## Short Stories by the World's Greatest Writers



ly exclaimed. "Is there no one in the world with an atom of brains? I don't want to go as 'Night' or 'Morning,' nor as 'Marguerite' or 'Pierrette,' or 'Madame la Pompadour'; I want something original!" And I stamped my foot to give emphasis to the re-

"Shall it be as 'Carmen,'

I sank into a chair in dismay. "Carmen!" This was the creature's idea of originality. It was too ludicrous for anger. I laughed and then, as I raised my eyes to Madame Virot's indignantly bewildered countenance, my glance fell upon a dress in a wardrobe behind her, and I pointed to it in a flutter

'Some one has originality, after all," I cried. What does that dress represent?"

"An ice palace, madame." "Mon Dieu! It is superb."

"Mais oui, madame, c'est magnifique, c'est un mircle," and then, carried away with enthusiasm, she rought it forth and dilated upon it. A pale-green ress, covered with a shimmering, sparkling net-work hat looked like frost itself.

"You see, madame, the headdress forms the snowy innacle of the tower, and the eau de Nil embroidered cirt follows the frosted outlines of the building, which a fac-simile of the ice palace raised last winter upon e Neva. An emerald satin mask, with tiny crystal icles hanging from the edge, in place of the usual inge of lace, completes the costume.'

"I must have it," I cried; "It is incomparable."

'It is sold, madame." "I will pay double."

"Impossible!

"I would willingly give it to madame, as it pleases er fancy, but I cannot; it was designed according to etches sent to me."

"Tush!" I impatiently exclaimed; "make a dupli-

"It is impossible, madame, for the dress is for the ame bal masque that you will attend." "And for whom?" I superciliously queried, for I was

eside myself with vexation. "Some nobody who has serincess in disguise, eh?"

"I make for no such people," Madame Virot exaimed, with a reflection of my own annoyance. "The ress is for the Countess Zarfine. If madame will sugest something else-"

I turned my eyes from the dress that tormented me, d racked my brains for something that should excel splendor, but the idea came not, and with a contempious glare I faced the inoffensive milliner, who had ded to please me for years, and had never more than ess Zarfine. alf succeeded.

"To be original nowadays," I said, indifferently, "is, fter all so commonpiace, that to be commonplace is

The Russian Cipher By HUAN MEE

took her proffered hand.

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in the past many diplomatic commissions, raised his hat and extended his hand. 'Madame, the gods love me.'

"Monsieur, you are too modest; you should have She suspects one of her husband's secretaries." used the feminine "

"I wanted to see you more than any other woman in Paris," he answered, "and, therefore, I repeat-The gods

Those whom 'the gods love,' monsieur-" and I smiled, for I would have given worlds to quarrel with some one, and preferably my best of friends.

"Die young,' eh?" he chuckled. "Well, the danger for me is past." And then, without waiting for an invitation, he calmly stepped into the carriage and seated himself beside me.

Here was, indeed, candor too wonderful for words, and I gazed reprovingly upon him.

"You must help me, ma chere," he said, gravely. "It is no pleasantry, but a serious matter-one that touches my reputation nearly."

"Well, mon ami?" "You know our relationship with Russia?"

"The pretty girl with inviting graces to a gallant who hesitates "Precisely," he answered, in a tone of appreciation at my simile; "but the pretty girl's love letters are being

"Humiliating."

love me.' "

"More than that," he cried, impetuously; "detrimental to me. Three times in the last month has the most secret cipher of the government been changed because identical with the receipt of our message by Russia its import has become public property in the capitals of Europe."

"Then ineffectually changed," I observed.

"Utterly. I have just left Count Zarfine, the Russian Ambassador, and he has dared to imply, in almost undiplematic language, that his government suspects us of triffing. Mon Dieu!" Monsleur Roche cried in an awestricken voice; "trifling with Russia!"

"Who holds this cipher?" "Myself and Count Zarfine. When it is changed, the new cipher is sent to St. Petersburg by him direct to the Minister, and the documents by me, through the diploared a card by chance, and wishes to be thought a matic departments. We have varied the cipher three times, we have sent different messengers each time, but the result has always been the same. The world learned the message at once, and we are fast becoming the laughing stock of Europe, for the pretty girl is ready to offer so much for alliance."

"And the Count could not help you, mon ami?" "He was brusque almost to rudeness, but his wife-"

"Ah, monsieur, his wife, what of her?" I asked, with a smile, for I well knew the fascinations of the Count-

"She knows, as I know," monsieur answered, "that, as in France, so in Russia, there are powerful influences against this alliance."

Monsieur Roche, the Premier, from whom I had received our final proposal will be made to Russia by the end of little, always following, with some ostentation of perthe week. On Wednesday morning I hand the new cipher to the Count, at night he dispatches it, but in the hours that intervene the Countess will discover the thief. "You have enlisted a new and powerful ally, mon-

> sieur," with a jealous tremor in my voice. "Tut, tut." he answered, mildly; "you are the ally I must have, for, frankly, I do not believe a word the

"Then the saints be praised," I ejaculated; "you are not the simpleton that I feared you were. But you go too far, mon ami, for all is true, excepting one thirg,

the name of the spy, and that is-" "Let us be diplomatic," he interrupted, "until we are sure. Take the missing quantity X."

"Why not Z?" I replied, and then I own I started with slight surprise at the coincidence, for the Countess herself cantered up to the side of the carriage, and I

"I do not believe in Z," Monsieur Roche cried, raising his voice a little. "Zero cannot win the race, notwithstanding her distance allowance"; and then he looked up and bowed to the Countess Zarfine.

"I did not suspect diplomacy found recreation in horseracing, monsteur," she exclaimed, with an arch

"Age has its follies as well as youth," he answered, and then leaned anxiously toward her and whispered:

"Any news?" "What can there be until then?" she asked. "On the night of the day chosen I shall know. At the bal masque I will tell you his name."

Monsieur Roche looked the picture of despair, and then, with a gesture as though the whole world had been lost to him, spoke in an undertone to the Countess, said something that I judged by a dainty frown she did not favor; but in an instant the cloud had passed, and she smiled again and answered: "As you will."

Yet to me it still seemed that she was being forced into some action she would not have elected of her own free choice.

Then Monsieur Roche, still a little embarrassed, turned to me. "A message-a written message-is to be conveyed to me at the bal masque; I cannot be there, and"-how charmingly he was confused-"will you receive it for me?"

"And take it at once to Le Quai d'Orsay," the Countess interjected.

"Bring it myself?" I cried, in simulated surprise, "Yes," monsieur answered, and tactfully continued, "I am shamed at the greatness of the favor I ask, but

"Very well," I reluctantly consented. "If that be so, I will do it"; and he murmured his thanks. "At midnight I shall pass the head of the staircase

and slip a note into your hand," the Countess exclaimed; "that will be the message." "But we are all incognito," I observed, with my most

ingenuous smile. "You will easily recognize me-I shall represent the 'Franco-Russe Alliance,' " she answered, with the ready lie of a Russian. "The national emblems and the national colors-the double eagle and the fleur-de-lis. And

"The 'Lost Provinces,' " I replied, meeting lie with

diplomatic evasion. The look of annoyance still slumbered in the depths of her dark eyes, and I thought, too, there was the glint of a dawning suspicion; but it was swiftly chased away as she turned with a jest to Monsieur Roche, and, after the interchange of a few pleasantries, nodded gayly to us both and rode off.

"You are well matched in one thing," Monsieur Roche suavely remarked, as he watched her retreating figure, 'your originality of costume.'

"And in another," I replied; "the fact that neither of us will wear what she has said she will." The dear man's eyebrows shot upward in bewilder-

"She will represent 'An Ice Palace,' I, 'Carmen.'" He looked at me for a moment in undisguised admiration, and then sank back and whispered with contented appreciation: "Mon Dieu! you are a wonderful woman.'

"And a fortunate one," I replied, "to win the approbation of so accomplished a diplomat."

"Ma chere," he murmured, "men are diplomats by education, women by intuition. It is civilization against nature."

"The dresses we have mentioned," I continued, "will probably be worn by our maids, leaving the Countess Zarfine at liberty to carry out her work, and me free to frustrate her; for I am certain now that it is she who reveals the cipher. Had I not known the costume she really intends to wear, I should have devoted the night really intends to wear, I should have devoted the night to watching the 'Franco-Russe Alliance.' As it is, my maid, the 'Lost Provinces,' will do that for the sake of diplomatic appearances; the Countess will be deceived, and I shall be free. So I require another card for the carnival—get it secretly for me."

"Success is assured," he cried, enthusiastically.

"Not so fast, mon ami. She already suspects me—I could see it in her eyes—and, therefore, you must act with consumpte tact; you must delay the delivery of

with consummate tact; you must delay the delivery the key on some pretense until an hour before the be and so render it impossible for it to be revealed to any one, except at the carnival. Then I know when it will be done—directly I have left."

done-directly I have left."
"After you have left?" he cried, in bewilderment,
"After my maid has left with the Countess Zarfine's

message for you."
"Ah," he sighed, and there was a world of admiration in the utterance of that monosyllable, but a moment after his face became grave again, as he suggested: "Perhaps the key may be given in such a way that you cannot prevent it—another note, for instance, skilfully passed from hand to hand."

"I think not. She would not risk anything so liable to be discovered. Beginger she suggested and more." I

to be discovered. Besides, she suspects; and more," I continued, "does not the whole idea of this bal masque proclaim the lady's love for the theatrical? No, mon ami, the cipher will be given in such a manner that if a man watched her actions every minute of the night he

would see nothing, but a woman might see much."

Monsieur smiled again, complaisantly.

"Then, too, if I fail, it is not ruin," I said, "for the documents will not be dispatched until you have heard from me. If I succeed, the evidence against her will be strong enough to give you all the proofs you need."

"No more suppositions, mon ami; you weary me."
"You're the cleverest woman in Parls," he said, with a glance of warm admiration, as he alighted and stood by my carriage.

"And you, for one who has left youth behind, are the most gallant man in France," I answered, with a glow of merriment, for I already counted my mission as accomplished.

"Left youth behind," he murmured, despondingly.
"You said so, mon ami."
"It was in an undiplomatic moment." "Therefore true, and your tongue, at least, is still youthful. Au revoir, monsieur."

Therese created a sensation. There are women even among my chosen acquaintances who insist upon their maids being stiff, and, if possible, ugly. Perhaps they fear the comparison which I am too satisfied with my-self to be concerned about, and on that night I was thankful that my choice had fallen upon a girl who could so admirably play the part I had selected for her, one whom I need not fear, by some vulgar gaucherie,

one whom I need not fear, by some vulgar gaucherie, would spoil my plans or endanger my success.

Therese created a sensation, and, as she entered, the audacity of her costume drew all eyes toward her.

Her pretty auburn curis were surmounted by the "Cap of Liberty," draped in crape; her skirt was of the palest yellow silk, with the outlines of our "Lost Provinces" in black; while, symbolical of the day we prayed for, the arms of France were more than half eclipsing those of Germany.

those of Germany.

For a moment there was the silence of admiration as she entered, and then a hum of applause burst into a short as each loyal heart caught the symbolical meaning of the fading colors of the German arms, almost hidden by the simple sweetness of our own dear fleur-de-lis, and patriotic voices cried: "Vive belle Alsace! Vive, vive Lorraine"

And Therese bore the sensation as I would have done myself. I turned a diamond half hoop on my finger, reflecting it was the last time I could do so, for tomorrow should be hers.
Strictly obedient to my instructions, she danced but

sistence, the movements of a lady who had attracted passing attention-the embodiment of the "Franco-Russe Alliance." It was a quaint sport we favored-the maid watching the maid.

Midnight struck, and from a secluded corner I saw the note passed to Therese, who quietly descended the steps, mingled for a moment in the kaleidoscopic throng. and so departed.

Then I added a new gown to the diamond ring, for what other girl could have left a carnival where she was the helle because she had been told to do so?

Like a modern Cinderella, she left it all, and yet, wiser than the damsel of the fairy tale, left before she was discovered, and I, a commonplace "Carmen"-for I remember there were three of us-now felt the decisive moment had arrived. A man had been watching group surrounding the Countess.

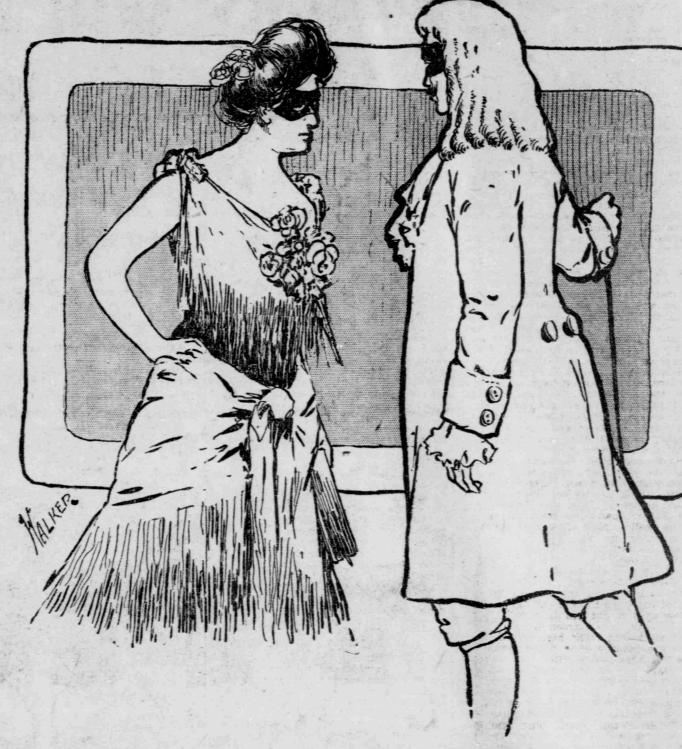
struck me with a sense of hidden meaning, and as the man carelessly took several, and, after lighting one, slipped the remainder into his pocket, the truth burst

upon me in a flash-the key to the cipher had been passed. On each cigarette paper was the key. I held it between my fingers half consumed, and those around were obligingly burning the others before her eyes, save for that man whom I knew still had three in his possession. What a thoughtless fool I had been, I who held all I needed in my grasp had myself destroyed it. The cigarette had burned down to my fingers. I was compelled to drop it, and he trod it to dust beneath his foot.

But he still had three. With an abandon worthy of "Carmen" herself I turned my fascinations upon him; with a swift glance at Gasnard, who instantly comprehended. I sent him to the side of the Countess, and she. nothing loath to be the centre of a group of admirers, elated because her mission was over, encouraged them. and kept them from her with the arts of one born to

The saints be praised, all men are young-or, at least, feel they are-when a pretty woman smiles upon them. He was what a diplomat would have called middle aged, but-saints be praised-I am a pretty woman.

"You are the incarnation of 'Carmen' herself," he whispered, as we found ourselves excluded from the



"'You Are a Clever Little Devil'"

Therese as she descended the staircase, and I touched him lightly upon the arm.

"The provinces are lost, monsieur." I said, softly, Be content with operatic Spain," and I hummed a melody of Rizet's

"You, madame?" he cried, as he recognized my voice.

"I thought she who just left was you." he said, as though anxious to explain the attention he had devoted to Therese.

"And I, monsieur, know my friends too well to be deceived by a masquerade," I answered, and, of a truth, I believe that there must have been a tell-tale trace of sentiment in my tones. And why not? Even a pretty widow may have sentimental moments at times when her dearest friend is near at hand. He looked straight into my eyes as though he would read my inmost

thoughts. "Do you mean that?"

"I mean this, Gaspard, mon cher ami. I want you to do me a favor. Indeed, before the night is out there may be many favors I need to ask, and I want you to grant them all."

favors, but pleasures."
"See," I cried, "that woman dressed in the frosted green gown-intended, I should think to represent an ice palace?" "Then they must be renamed," he answered, "not

"Do you know who she is?"
"No; who can say?" he replied, with a slight shrug must be near her for the rest of the night-I want to watch her."

The Countess Zarfine was walking slowly across the ballroom, her hand resting upon the arm of a tall man in the dress of an exquisite of the period of Louis XIV, and, quickly grasping my meaning, Gaspard strolled aimlessly in the same direction, carrying on an animated conversation with me all the while, which raised him

greatly in my estimation as a budding diplomat.

"They are going to sit upon the balcony," I found an instant to whisper, and we followed them, my nerves thrilling with delight as I realized the strength of my position, for now the Countess would feel herself secure, thinking that I had departed.

She was seated upon a basket chair upon the balcony

She was seated upon a basket chair upon the balcony overlooking the Champs Elysees, talking, in a voice that challenged criticism, of the new play at the Renaissance, and Gaspard skilfully led me to a seat facing them, and by my side. And then the clever boy entered with zest into the

Bohemian conceit of the bal masque, for without a word of introduction he joined in their conversation, and in an instant we were a quartette discussing the frivolities

Gradually an idle group grew round us-flattering gallants who protested with glowing compliments "that it was to cruel of their hostess to hide all the lovely faces of Paris behind silken masks. "It must be because she is jealous," the Countess cried, with a smile that showed for an instant the gleam

of her tooth; "she fears the contrast."

But then—for men, despite their deceit, are strangely truth; also sometimes—no one dared to dispute the beauty of his hostess, and her eyes gleamed with gratified pride as her sneer was left unsupported in the silence—yet

as her sneer was left unsupported in the silence—yet perhaps they were suspicious.

"Still, messieurs," she exclaimed, with a ripple of laughter, "since our faces are hidden, our freedom is greater—we may be more Bohemian." And in an instant she produced a gold case, and, extracting a cigarette, placed it with a gesture of impudence between her lips.

"Those who love me join with me," she continued, handing the case to the surrounding group.

It seemed to me that there was a falseness in this It seemed to me that there was a falseness in this ingenuous mood that sat but ill upon one so contemptu-

In an instant the blue smoke curled in the air from half a dozen cigarettes. half a dozen cigarettes.

""Carmen," she cried, reproachfully, with a glance at me, "you who should have led the way still hesitate," and she extended the case, and carefully lighted the cigarette for me from her own.

"And you, monsieur," with a glance at the man who had been her companion from the ballroom.

"It was a privilege I had never anticipated, and so came unprepared."

"Then she who grants permission supplies the means of enjoyment. Take two, or three, or four, or what you will; their fragrance may be even greater in the morning."

"Merci, monsieur, you flatter me-it is the dress that attracts you." "No: it is the sparkle of your eyes behind that en-

vious mask, the grace of each gesture, the soul of music in your voice, the poetry in every motion that proclaims you the ideal 'Carmen.' " "Save for one thing: a cigarette, s'il vous plait,

monsieur," and I extended my hand. Slowly, even as though he realized that he was being drawn into a trap, he took one of them from his pocket

and hesitatingly handed it to me. Half suspiciously, half in a fashion of tenderness, he held a match to the cigarette, and then, almost before

the paper had caught, it dropped through my fingers to the ground; and I, with a laugh at my carelessness, placed my heel upon it and edged it beneath my skirt, My shoe pressed upon it lightly, my lips smiled apologetically, yet murmured, "Merci, monsieur," as I

awaited another to replace it. I saw his features tighten as his eyes followed my movements, yet what could he do? Realizing that I

had discovered him, and I could not but feel that he knew it, he gave me another, and I lighted it. For a second we measured glances, and I knew that he fathomed my plans as truly as I did his. "You are a clever little devil!" he said, with almost

touch of appreciation. You have my cigarette under your shoe, but what of that? In a minute I shall offer you my arm, you will take it, we shall go to the ballroom and dance the co-

"Perfectly. I have only to raise my voice and say:
"The air is cool," and the Countess will understand; she
will rejoin us, and that being so, a lady cannot search
for a half-burred cigarette. You have the desire of
your quest within your reach, and yet as far removed
as the north is from the south."

I looked disdenially at him and columbs are last

I looked disdainfully at him and calmly smoked.

"You are too clever to waste yourself upon such pettiness," he whispered. "In Russia I would find you a sphere worthy of your talents, and make you a duchess.
"I fail to understand, monsieur."

He leaned forward until his eyes looked straight into mine, and spoke with deliberate emphasis.
"I am going to stoop and take from under your chair a cigarette, and you must perforce permit me.

Because if you attempted to resist I should prevent See, I slowly stoop to regain my own."
He bent as he spoke, and then, as the inspiration flashed upon me. my hands went swiftly to my throat, and, with a sudden clutch, I snapped my necklace, and a shower of pearls scattered upon the balcony.

a shower of pearls scattered upon the balcony.
"My pearls!" I cried in dismay, and, brushing past
him to save them as they fell, I picked up the cigarette
from beneath my skirt and looked mockingly into his "You are a clever little devil!" he said, with chagrined appreciation.
I smiled, for the key to the cipher was safe in my

But men count for nothing in such matters, for men can even hold admiration for a victorious enemy-here there was a woman to deal with.

While the gallants who had clustered around the Countess were collecting my truant pearls, she walked across and glared into my face with eyes that blazed with fery.

In passion she tore the mask from her face, and
In passion she tore the mask from her face, and because she was pleased to confess herself. I accepted the challenge and removed mine. She forgot her civilization, her breeding, her position, everything, and dropped back into the barbarous language of her ancestors.

"If I only had you in Russia!" she gasped, her lips almost touching my ear. "I'd have you flogged for this: I'd have your lying tongue torn out, and those shoulders you're so proud of branded 'Spy.' God! If I had you in Russia!" 'And yet," I murmured, "methinks these charms of

"And yet," I murmured, "methinks these charms of Russia must be enjoyed by you alone, and swiftly, too, for surely—his Excellency will resign at once."

"God!" she cried, "if I had you in Russia!"

I turned away, but stole a backward glance at her as she stood, her whole body trembling, her fingers clutching the balustrade to support her quivering figure, and then he came forward and handed me my pearls.

It was the third time he had said it, and there was a crescendo of meaning in the phrase he whispered:

"You are a clever little devil!"



My landau pulled up as we entered the gates, and

That is stolen in Paris." The Count himself, and dispatched at once to those

Childlike in its simplicity," I murmured, with a "The Countess is a wonderful woman," he admitted. and then continued: "You see how easy it is. These people can gain access to the documents passing between France and Russia, but not to the key of the

was rumored that even our host and hostess would ive up to their own house and enter amid the throng, one was to know any one, and yet every one was to low every one; no master of the ceremonies, no host d hostess, no introductions or formal presentations he fact that one was there was an official stamp upon c's passport of reputation. It was a Bohemian idea orthy of her who had brought it to Paris—the Countess of the wife of the Russian Ambassador, and since, perrece, I must be masked, I would have dazzled by art stead of nature; yet it was not to be, and I grew peevas I nursed my discomfiture. cipner—that is stolen here."
"And, of course, the thief is known already," I cried, disdainfully. "Almost," he replied, with the first flash of enthusiasm he had manifested—"almost. On Wednesday we shall catch him in the very act. Of one thing we are certain. He moves in diplomatic circles, and knows that

He lowered his voice and continued impressively, "Influences so powerful that it might be possible for them to obtain our secret papers, open them, read them and then reseal them and pass them on to their destination."

"But that would be useless without the key to the cipher, mon ami."